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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ASEC](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: POSTAL WORKERS ON STRIKE

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) Workers from the Ivorian state postal company & Poste de Cote d'Ivoire⁸ led by the main union, the National Post and Telecommunications Union (SYNAPOSTEL) went on strike on February 9 in opposition to a court ruling reinstating the former Director General Sebastien ZEHI, who had been sacked in September 2006 for malfeasance. As a result, mail distribution and other postal operations have been disrupted throughout the country.

¶2. (C) In June 2006, SYNAPOSTEL went on strike to demand that Zehi be removed from office because of allegations that he embezzled company assets. According to union sources, 27 out of 57 vehicles donated by China vanished, and video conferencing equipment that appeared on the books as paid for never arrived. Zehi is another crony of President Gbagbo, and union sources are convinced that these assets or the money from selling them ended up in the coffers of Gbagbo's FPI (Ivoirian Popular Front) party. In September, Zehi was dismissed by the Board of Directors and replaced by a new Director General, Omer Konan Kan.

¶3. (U) Zehi went to court to challenge the Board's determination, and in early February the national Appeals Court vacated the Board's decision and reinstated Zehi. The Court based its decision on the assertion that Director Generals of public institutions are appointed or removed from office solely by presidential decree.

¶4. (C) On February 14, the Supreme Court suspended Zehi's reinstatement until it holds a hearing on the matter March 5. Union sources tell us they have no intention of calling off the strike because of this temporary measure.

¶5. (U) This strike has disrupted commerce but has not brought it to a halt. Companies that normally send bills by mail now must use courier services such as DHL. People who normally pay bills by mail now must use money transfer services such as Western Union.

¶5. (C) Comment. President Gbagbo very jealously guards his asserted right to have sole power to hire and fire senior officials. The fact that UN Security Council Resolution 1721 indirectly calls for the Prime Minister to share this power was the biggest reason he cited for refusing to fully implement the resolution. On the other hand, this was one of the most important points on which the French wanted the authority of the resolution to take precedence, if necessary, over the Ivoirian constitution.

¶6. (C) By our reading of the constitution, technically it is the Council of Ministers that decides on hiring and firing senior officials. Article 51 states in part, "The Council of Ministers deliberates obligatorily...on the nominations to the senior offices of the State..." However, the President does preside over the Council of Ministers and its decisions are put into effect by presidential decree. In any case, Zehi's dismissal was not brought before the Council of

Ministers so we expect the Supreme Court to ultimately uphold the lower court,s decision to reinstate him. End Comment.

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